DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 936 PS 022 658

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TITLE Reggio Emilia: An In-Depth View.
PUB DATE 13 Jul 94
NOTE 35p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Art Activities; Comparative Analysis; Early Childhood Education; Educational Administration; Educational History; Educational Philosophy; Foreign Countries; Influences; Parent Participation; *Preschool Curriculum; *Preschool Education; Program Descriptions; Small Group Instruction; *Student Centered Curriculum; Teacher Role; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Developmentally Appropriate Programs; Emergent Curriculum; Italy (Reggio Emilia); *Reggio Emilia Approach; United States

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the preschool programs of the Reggio Emilia region of Northern Italy, describing the role of Loris Malaguzzi in the founding of the municipal preschools in the region after the Second World War and discussing the theoretical and philosophical basis of the child-centered, developmentally appropriate, art-centered Reggio Emilia approach. The administrative infrastructure, the facility and environment, the faculty, and emergent curriculum of the infant/toddler centers and preschools are examined, along with the role that parents play in the education of their children. The world-wide impact of the Reggio Emilia approach to preschool education is analyzed (more than 10,000 visitors have come to Reggio Emilia from all over the world to visit its preschools since 1979). The implications of the approach for early childhood education in the United States is discussed, centering on two areas of concern in the United States--the appropriateness of both full-day care and academic programs for preschoolers. Areas of agreement between Reggio Emilia and American practices are listed, along with areas in which Reggio presents a challenge to American views of early childhood education. An appendix describes 11 student projects undertaken in Reggio Emilia preschools and in American preschools using the Reggio Emilia Approach. (Contains 19 references.) (MDM)

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ED 376 936

Reggio Emilia:

An In-Depth View

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July 13, 1994

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Introduction

The preschool programs of Reggio Emilia, a city located in the economically thriving northern Italian province of Emilia-Romagna, have generated a level of interest among early childhood educators worldwide, as well as in America, that has not been seen in decades. This paper will attempt through review of current literature to comprehensively describe the Reggio approach within the context of its particular history and demographics, theoretical and philosophical bases, and overall structure as it relates to the administrative infrastructure, facility and environment, teachers, curriculum, children and parents. Particular attention will be given to the impact the Reggio schools have had on the outside world and the possible implications Reggio may have for the care and teaching of young children in the United States.

History/Present Demographics

In the recently published book, The 100 Languages of Children, the editors point out that the evolution of the Reggio Emilia schools is interwoven with the history and development of early childhood education in Italy from its early beginnings in the 19th century (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman, 1993). Since the 1820's, private initiatives provided for the care of infants and young children to varying degrees. Some of these were known as "presepi" (creches) and were sponsored by industrialists interested in the welfare and productivity of mothers working in factories.

The state became involved in the care of young children at the beginning of the 20th century. The primary focus was to reduce infant mortality rates within a social service context through assistance and education for young mothers. During this earlier part of the 20th Century, Italian early childhood education was highly influenced by the

work of Maria Montessori, John Dewey and the Progressive movement, and the work of Carolina and Rosa Agazzi, who set up training programs for teachers. The Catholic church began to have increasing influence and control over early childhood programs(Edwards, et al., 1993).

A national law, the"Protection and Assistance of Infancy," was passed in 1925 which established the National Organization for Maternity and Infancy (ONMI). This organization was to exert a major influence on the establishment of early childhood programs throughout Italy until 1975. The emergence of the Fascist regime cemented the influence of the church to the exclusion of other approaches to early childhood care and education. By the end of World War II, however, both the state and the church were in turmoil, and the time was ripe for exploration of new initiatives(Edwards, et al., 1993).

Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia schools, describes his experience six days after the end of the war in the town of Villa Cella, where he observed parents beginning to build a school for young children with the proceeds of an abandoned tank, a few trucks, and six horses. The school became known as the "school of the tank" and was followed quickly by seven additional schools, all begun by parents. Malaguzzi offered his services as a teacher, and quickly became involved in dialogue with current educators and philosophers of the day to conceptualize what would become the Reggio schools today. He was highly influenced by Bruno Ciari, a teacher/activist who advocated a resurgence of the progressive approach espoused by Dewey, through the Movement for Cooperative Education (MCE), founded in 1951. Malaguzzi's philosophy also drew from the constructivist theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, as well as other innovative European thinkers of the time. During the social upheaval of the 1960's and 70's, Malaguzzi

explained that although the issues of pre-primary schools were being hotly contested on a national level, the debates focused on social service aspects of care for young children. This provided an opportunity for unhindered development of conceptual thought about curriculum and the structure of the schools in Reggio Emilia (Edwards, et al., 1993).

In Reggio Emilia, the network of post-war parent-run schools was well-established by the early 1960's. Although state support of education had existed informally for most of the century, in the middle 1960's social legislation was enacted that provided the administrative framework which guides the Reggio program today. In 1963, the first municipal preschool in Italy was opened in Reggio Emilia(New, 1990b, Gandini & Radke, 1994) and in 1967 all of the parent-run schools were placed under the administration of the municipality. These local initiatives were followed by a national law in 1968 which established community funding for preschool programs. Reggio Emilia was well ahead of the rest of Italy in this respect because it wasn't until 1975 that the arrangement was formalized throughout the country with the official transfer of all parent-run schools to the municipalities from ONMI (Edwards, et al., 1993).

Today in Reggio Emilia, virtually all children of preschool age attend school. Approximately 33% attend church schools, 18% private or state schools, and the remaining 49% attend the Reggio municipal schools which are now so well-known. Of the 42% of infants and toddlers in daycare, close to 88% attend the municipal centers, which operate on a sliding income scale (New, 1990a). Children are enrolled with preference given to those with disabilities, single parents, those with no grandparents, difficult schedules, or who live in the neighborhood (Gandini, 1993, Gandini & Radke, 1994). The 22 preschools and 13 infant/toddler centers provide a blend of care and

education that reflects the Italian committment to community-supported social services, and receive 12% of the town budget for their operation (Gandini, 1993; New, 1989, 1993).

Theoretical/Philosophical Bases

The Reggio philosophy and theoretical base has evolved over the past thirty years in a dynamic process which continues to be defined and refined by those who interact with the system - the teachers, parents, children, and community. While there are certain fundamental and well-articulated elements of the approach which provide the underpinnings for the Reggio philosophy, Malaguzzi emphasizes that the theory behind Reggio requires ongoing dialogue, research with children, and revisitation of ideas as necessary guides to practice(Edwards, et al., 1993). This examination of the Reggio approach will focus on ideas about the image of the child, learning theory, and the modalities of collaboration and reciprocity which are central to the way in which the program achieves its goals.

Carlina Rinaldi (Edwards, et al.,1993) describes the Reggio view of the child as central to its philosophy - a child who is "rich, strong, and powerful...unique subjects with rights rather than simply needs"(p. 102). Lella Gandini, the official liason from Reggio Emilia to the United States, further elaborates on this idea by presenting an image of children who are curious and prepared to learn, who construct learning and are social interactionists-negotiators with the environment, and human beings who all have enormous potential(1993). This underlying respect for the child provides the base for what the founder, Loris Malaguzzi, (1993, p. 9) states is the goal of Reggio: "to create an 'amiable' school - that is, a school that is active, inventive, livable, documentable,

and communicative." He further defines the aim of the program to create "a place of research, learning, revisiting, reconsideration, reflection." (p. 9) At the center of the educational process a triad of children, teachers, and parents function collaboratively as protagonists who all have equal importance and an investment in the intellectual and social potential of the children involved in the learning process (Edwards, et al. 1993, Gandini, 1993; Malaguzzi, 1993). Gandini(1993) and Rinaldi (Edwards, et al., 1993) explain that the Reggio schools are not "experimental" but part of a social service delivery system which acknowledges that every child has rights, particularly the right to a high quality education.

The Reggio philosophy derives from basic principles about learning which are not new - particularly the progressive ideas of John Dewey and the constructivist theories of Jean Piaget and Len Vygotsky, as well as other European thinkers such as Carugati, Doise, Kaye, and Mugny (Gandini, 1993). But Malaguzzi has been quick to point out that in Reggio, there has never been a tendency to adopt the views of any theorist without modification and application of ideas to their own particular cultural and idealogical context. While the Reggio philosophy soundly affirms the child's affinity and ability to construct his own knowledge, Malaguzzi raises several criticisms of Piagetian constructivism which he believes isolate the child, undervalue the roles of adults, and underestimate the complex interconnectedness of cognitive, affective, and moral development (Edwards, et al., 1993). Malaguzzi includes Vygotsky's delineation of the "zone of proximal development" as crucial to the foundation of teacher-child relationships, and all those who work with children in Reggio value the operation of thought and language together in the process of building symbolic representation of ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Rinaldi (Edwards, et al., 1993) further emphasizes that

at Reggio, adults believe that cognition does not develop in isolation, but in a spiral fashion intertwined with socialization and the affective domain. So in Reggio, constructivism has been reinvented and re-articulated as "social constructivism," and the child is always considered in relation to others; he co-constructs both his developing socialization abilities along with his ever-expanding intellectual capacities. Within this framework, conflict and disequilibrium are seen as essential elements to provide for the transformation and development of relationships.

Collaboration and reciprocity are seen as the key elements to building, maintaining, and transforming the relationships between teachers, children, and parents(Gandini, 1993). Malaguzzi describes relationships as the "fundamental, organizing strategy...a coming together of elements interacting dynamically toward a common purpose"(1993, p. 10). Communication, then, is necessary for the reciprocal process of collaborative relationship building. In Reggio, one of the hallmark pieces of the philosophy is that communication takes many forms, any of which a child should be free choose to use at any given moment to best express himself - thus the phrase "100 languages of children." Three elements believed necessary for effective communication and expression are networking, open exchange, and a free and democratic atmosphere (Malaguzzi, 1993). Tizianna Filippini, who works in Reggio Emilia, likened the principle of reciprocity with a game of catch - communication and interaction occur between children and adults as they toss the ball back and forth in a gentle, playful exchange that involves them both in the process of meaning-making (Rankin, 1992).

From these ideas about learning and communication, Reggio Emilia has developed their strategies and ideas about the roles of the children, teachers, parents, and other

adults within the cultural context of the community and what the structure, curriculum, and organization of the program should look like.

Description of Structure and Organization

Administrative Infrastructure

According to Sergio Spaggiari, the current Director of Early Childhood Education in Reggio Emilia, in Italy the national government is responsible for funding education, the regions are responsible for overall planning, and the municipalities participate through community-based management of the schools(Edwards, et al., 1993). Each school has a parent-teacher board with 13-51 elected members, depending on the size of the school. A municipal advisory council (La Consulta) is composed of elected parent representatives from each school, the pedagogisti (education coordinators) and atelieristi (art specialists for each school), the Assessore (elected city official in charge of education), mayor, and the administrator for early childhood education (Edwards, et al., 1993; New, 1989). This representative group guides and governs the administration of all of the preschool and infant/toddler centers in Reggio Emilia.

There are two types of schools: infant/toddler centers (Asilo Nido, which means "nest") for children 4 months to age 3 and preschools (Scuola dell'Infanzia) for children age 3-6. At each school, there are two teachers for each classroom of 12 infants, 18 toddlers, or 28 preschoolers. One of the most distinguishing features of the organization of the schools is that the children remain with the same teachers and children for the entire length of time they are at the school. Each school has an "atelierista" who is an art specialist and functions as a consultant, collaborator, and archivist for the teachers, children, and parents(Edwards, et al., 1993, Gandini & Radke, 1994). A team of

"pedagogisti" act as liasons between the schools and the administration. Tizianna Filippini describes her role as a pedagogista as a complex one which is hard to translate into terms understandable to Americans. She explains that they work within the system and have varying responsibilities. A pedagogista works with both city administration and municipal offices to discuss policy and problems with the network. She has specific duties at certain schools which involve exchange of information, discussing theory and practice with all of the adults who are part of the program, teachers and parents alike. A pedagogista may also have organizational responsibilities such as scheduling of staff work hours or parent meetings. One of the most important functions of the pedagogista is to coordinate the professional development of teachers. The role is continually being constructed as needs demand. Cooperation is seen as the foundation of the system, and the pedagogista is a key player in the dynamics of collaboration (Edwards, et al., 1993; Gandini, 1993, Gandini & Radke, 1994).

Facility/environment

The environment of each facility is unique because it is intended to be a reflection of those who created and have, or currently do inhabit the space. Planning the facilities is a collaborative effort involving all those who use them. Each school however, has features which all schools share. There is a common committment to make the spaces beautiful and harmonious, places which will support cooperation and interaction, and provide evidence of the culture of the school and its families. The buildings make ample use of light, gardens, and open space. The environment is regarded as part of the curriculum and central to the dynamics of organization(Edwards, et al., 1993; Gandini & Radke, 1994; New, 1989). Gandini describes three kinds of spaces: those for individuals, those for social interaction, and those which appear to be marginal, but are

really indiginous to the total environment. "Marginal" spaces such as the kitchen have glass windows so that children and cooks can see each other and observe what is going on in each room. Bathrooms are considered places of social importance, and have artwork and colorful arrangements of toothbrushes, cups, towels, etc. She also explains that spaces are designed to be appropriate for different ages and levels of development. Space is expected to be organized and provide for active involvement. The environment should document what takes place within its walls and teach by the messages that it sends(Edwards, et al., 1993; New, 1989, 1990a). Carefully constructed ongoing displays are evidence of work-in-progress and the thoughtful arrangement of materials to invite exploration demonstrate the value placed on aesthetics in Reggio schools. Small details like colorful photograph "menus" in the restaurant-like lunchrooms have universally impressed visitors to the schools(New, 1989).

The "atelier" is a central feature to each school. Because of the emphasis the philosophy places on symbolic representation through many "languages," the atelier functions as the place where expression through media becomes inseparable from the learning process(Gandini, 1993). It could be compared to an art studio, but Reggio educators will carefully explain that the purpose of the atelier is much more complex than simply a place to "do art." Vea Vecchi, the Atelierista of the Diana School describes three functions of the atelier. It is a place where children work at learning to master techniques with a variety of media and art materials to add to their "vocabulary" of expressive languages. Secondly, it is also a place where adults can come for reflection to broaden their understanding of the children's learning and thinking processes. Thirdly, the atelier functions as an archives, a place for documentation of everything that goes on in the school and where present and past work can be revisited and savored again and

again(Edwards, et al., 1993). In 1976, "mini atelieri," small studio spaces, were added to individual classrooms to supplement the main atelier in each school(Gandini & Radke, 1994; New, 1990b).

Less visible to the eye, but a critically important component of the environment of each school is the way in which time is organized and children's work conducted. Children have a daily sequence of activities, but time is flexible and loosely structured to permit ongoing work and accommodate "child time" as opposed to units of time arbitrarily designated by adults(New, 1990b; Rosen, 1992). Typically, children arrive and engage in free choice activities. Morning meetings are conducted during which the children discuss events at home, review prior day activities, and plan the work for the day. They then work on projects or play until lunchtime. Rest time is provided after lunch and then children continue explorations or projects until they leave(Rosen, 1992). The day proceeds at a leisurely pace allowing as much time as needed or wanted to accomplish tasks and investigations. Because children remain with the same teacher and children year after year, there is no pressure to finish a project by a certain date, and project work often continues informally over the summer vacations, and then resumes in the fall(Edwards, et al., 1993).

The other distinguishing feature of the "invisible" environment is the belief that children work best and develop collaboration and significant relationships at an optimal level when working in pairs or small groups. Malaguzzi(1993) explains that in Reggio, small group organization is valued because of the complex interactions, constructive conflicts and opportunity for self-regulation which occur within the "cultural context" of a limited number of children. Within a social constructivist framework, small groups can also provide scaffolding across all of the domains through interaction and

facilitate symbolic play (p.11). In a discussion on "reciprocity" Baji Rankin, who traveled from the United States to conduct doctoral research at Reggio described how group work extends the expertise of children working on projects through the mutual exchange of reflection and multiple points of view, but in a context that is manageable for both teacher and children(1992). The organization of spaces and furniture in Reggio schools reflects this view.

Teachers in Reggio Schools

To articulate succinctly the role of the teacher in Reggio, Loris Malaguzzi quotes Piaget in 100 Languages of Children (p. 77) when he states that the "aim of teaching is to provide the conditions for learning." He uses the statement to emphasize that teaching and learning are not the same thing and that [teachers] "must learn to teach nothing to children except what children can learn by themselves"(p. 66). Carolyn Edwards elaborates this view by describing the teacher's role "not so much to 'facilitate' learning in the sense of 'making smooth or easy,' but rather to 'stimulate' it by making problems more complex, involving, and arousing."(p. 157).

The general role and responsibilities of teachers in Reggio is similar to that of teachers in America but expanded in its attention to consistency with the theoretical social constructivist base of the program and the expectations that teachers will conduct systematic research on children and teaching as part of their daily work. In Italy, early childhood teachers receive only a secondary level education, and virtually all professional development takes place through their work and in-service training. Teachers are viewed as "co-learners" and according to Tizianna Filippi, pedagogista, they receive 107 hours of in-service training per year as well as 40 hours per year for other seminars and workshops(Edwards, et al., 1993). In Reggio, the committment to

teacher training reflects the importance placed on a collaborative effort for the benefit of parents and children. They spend approximately 30 hours per week with the children and 6 hours per week meeting with each other, pedagogisti, and parents(Gandini & Radke, 1994). Planning meetings serve several important purposes. Rinaldi explains in 100 Languages of Children that staff work, participation, the environment, and children's activities are all seen as interrelated and are discussed concurrently (Edwards, et al.,1993).

One of the most important roles of the teacher is that of "documenter." Gandini(1993) describes how documentation fulfills many important functions: developing parental awareness, increasing understandings about children, evaluation of teacher's work, facilitating the exchange of ideas, valuing the efforts of children, and serving as historical archival evidence. Teachers with the help of the atelierista, carefully use cameras, tape recorders, video recorders, written reflections, and graphic representations of all kinds to preserve children's observations, ongoing work, and symbolic representations of their projects and activities (Edwards, et al., 1993, Gandini & Radke, 1994).

Teachers share ongoing work with children with the other teachers and continual dialogue provides both built-in support as well as constructive criticism. Teachers are expected to "construct" their own professional development much in the same way they guide chidren to continually build their own social and intellectual development (Edwards, et al., 1993).

Role of Parents

Rebecca New, in 1989, described the home-school partnership from the perspective of daycare: not seen as it is in the United States, as an issue of "maternal

substitution"(p. 5) but rather "how to use other adults and children as resources for the child and family."(p.7) The role of parents is described by Lella Gandini (1993) as including day-to-day interaction, discussion of theoretical and practical issues, participation in special events, and the expectation that they will actively "participate", rather than be "involved" in their child's education. Sergio Spaggiari outlines meetings of many different kinds during the course of a year which parents attend. These include individual, small group, and classroom meetings, or can be meetings which revolve around a theme or to interact with experts. Parents also participate in work sessions, workshops of one kind or another and various celebrations and field trips(Edwards, et al., 1993). At enrollment, parents are expected to share information about their children, meet with the cook to discuss the child's preferences and nutritional needs, and a notebook or album is begun which will be the beginning of a personal record of the child's experience at the school. Parents are encouraged to stay and observe or visit in the child's room during the initial adjustment period, and are welcome in the center at any time. Often they are asked to extend the work children are doing at school on various projects with experiences at home(New, 1989). It is part of the Reggio philosophy that complex relationships between staff, parents, and children benefit the long-term experience of the child and family in the school.

Curriculum

Two quotations can best describe the emergent curriculum of Reggio Emilia schools. Malaguzzi says in 100 Languages of Children that [pre-planned curriculum] is "teaching without learning; we would humiliate the schools and the children by entrusting them to forms, dittos, and handbooks of which publishers are generous distributors."(p. 85) Carlina Rinaldi, pedagogista, states that "...the potential of

children is stunted when the endpoint of their learning is formulated in advance."(p. 104). The constructivist theoretical foundation of Reggio Schools manifests itself in the curriculum through the idea that children learn through engagement with the environment and should be given the opportunity to explain what they have experienced. The process of symbolic representation through the "100 languages" within a cooperative, collaborative, framework enables them to grow and develop socially and intellectually. This is accomplished through the use of both short and long-term projects which may take a few days, or several months. In Reggio, adults believe that children need long periods of time to work on ideas, time that will allow them to revisit an idea as often as necessary to come to a conclusion that is acceptable and pleasing to them(Edwards, et al., 1993; Gandini, 1993; Gandini & Radke, 1994; New, 1990b)

The process of emergent curriculum planning begins as teachers observe and interact with children. They choose projects in three ways. A project can result from the children's natural encounters with the environment, or reflect mutual interests of the children and adults. Or it can be based on the teacher's ideas about cognitive or social concepts the children are developmentally and receptively ready for. Teachers intentionally create disequilibrium through structured discrepant events to generate interest and questions from children. Teachers reflect on children's actions and plan projects based on their observations. They formulate generalized goals, but do not plan specific objectives or project goals in advance. Instead, they hypothesize and brainstorm as many possible directions the project may take as possible, to prepare materials and activities. Children and teachers enter into the project adventure together as co-learners with no particular destination in mind. As work progresses, goals are adapted to the needs and interests of the children, and planning is ongoing. Generally,

projects begin with an experience, and children are then encouraged to start with a graphic exploration of their ideas. The teachers then probe with open-ended questions to develop the interests of the children in investigative directions. Ample time is given to experiment, explore, and develop ideas. Teachers often tape record, transcribe, and reread the children's conversations and work to encourage reflection and discussion. The group size varies with the interest and developmental levels of the projects. Results of projects are shared with whomever is appropriate: other children, families, teachers, or the community (Edwards, et al., 1993; Gandini, 1993; Gandini & Radke, 1994; New, 1990b).

Teachers in Reggio ardently believe that their approach to curriculum is appropriate and successful, but they, like teachers everywhere, encounter difficulties implementing curriculum because of its emergent character. The two concerns mentioned most often are the difficulty of maintaining the right level of challenge and knowing when to intervene appropriately. Support and dialogue with other teachers and parents is critical to the continued success of their work and they make the point that it is the entire system that enables the curriculum to work so effectively(Edwards, et al., 1993).

The Impact of the Reggio Approach

Since 1979, over 10,000 visitors have come to Reggio Emilia from all over the world from countries such as Sweden, West Germany, Argentina, Japan, and the United States, to study and reflect on the preschool system and the cultural context within which they operate(Gandini, 1993; New 1990a). Two traveling exhibitions entitled, "The 100 Languages of Children" were prepared by the staff, parents, and children of

Reggio(one for Europe, and the other for English-speaking countries)to display visually the philosophy, structure, and work that children do.

Visitors characteristically comment and are amazed at the quality of work done by the children, and the aesthetic quality of the environment(Katz, 1990; New, 1990a). Impressions of Reggio often generate reflection and revisitation of both personal and general beliefs about early childhood education and what teachers and children can and should be doing(Katz, 1990).

Teachers and administrators from Reggio have been invited to share their ideas and expertise with others. Lella Gandini has been in the United States as an official liason between Reggio and America, and also works as an adjunct professor at the University of Massachusetts. Formally, collaborative projects involving Reggio teachers and American demonstration programs have taken place or are currently underway. Amelia Gambetti, who worked in the Reggio schools for 25 years, coordinated a year-long cooperative effort at the lab school of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and is currently involved in the Model Early Learning Center program in Washington, D.C.(Gandini & Radke, 1994). Informally, many teachers who visit Reggio, or read extensively about the schools, are making personal initiatives to implement Reggio theory and practices in their own programs; several examples are described in The 100 Languages of Children(Edwards, et al., 1993).

Inevitably, comparisons are made with the Progressive schools of the early 20th Century, the open British Primary Schools in England, and the initiatives with open education in America in the 1960's and 1970's. Analysis of similarities and differences in theory, structure, and practice have produced an ongoing international dialogue forming the basis for cross-cultural exchange and in-depth study of not only the Reggio

program, but other successful early childhood programs around the world(Edwards et al., 1993).

Implications for Early Childhood Education in the United States

Reflection on the Reggio Emilia approach has generated much in the way of thought about the implications for American programs. Interest in the United States seems to revolve around the two major aspects of early childhood education which are of concern and under debate at present- the appropriateness of both full-day care and academic programs for preschoolers. A growing awareness of the range of diversity in approaches to early childhood education in other cultural contexts has produced a willingness and eagerness to reexamine our beliefs and attitudes about possibilities(New, 1990b). Reggio demonstrates its committment to reflect not just Italian culture, but the specific features unique to its families and community but it has been said again and again that the Reggio Emilia schools are not a model to be copied. The program is a result of decades of careful reflection on theory and practice that is appropriate to its own unique setting(Gandini, 1993). American educators are fully aware in 1994 of the initiatives in this country which have failed in the past, not because they were not worthy endeavors, but because we failed to appreciate the importance of the contextual factors which influence and dictate whether or not a theory can become successfully functioning practice. The scope, breadth, and depth of social, cultural, and economic diversity in this country is a factor which has been underestimated in the past, and the temptation to take a successful program and try to replicate it intact has been hard to resist. So, what has been learned from Reggio Emilia that can be of value to work with young children in America?

First of all, it is important to look for similarities; areas of agreement between accepted ideas about theory and practice both here and as evidenced in the preschools of Reggio Emilia.

1 The concept of developmentally appropriate practice and the Reggio philosophy have at their core a similar grounding in constructivist and developmental theory and there is much common ground to be explored through continued dialogue. NAEYC has articulated the importance of meaningful work with children within an environmental context that is appropriate to both their age, developmental level, and cultural background(Bredekamp, 1987; Derman-Sparks, 1989)

2. While emergent curriculum as applied in Reggio through project work is practice at a more complex level of development than we have seen here, there are many teachers and programs who appreciate and understand the value of integrated curriculum. Although the commercialization of innapropriate thematic units is rampant, the idea of developing concepts in an integrated fashion has taken root once again in America, and early childhood teachers, in particular, recognize the value of making connections and developing relationships in the learning process(New, 1990b).

3. The Reggio Emilia schools operate with acknowledgement, respect, and integration of the cultural heritage of their families and community. In America, we have always appreciated the magnitude of the level of diversity that exists in our melting pot society, but it has often been viewed in a problematic sense. In early childhood, a concerted effort is taking place to absorb and appreciate that this very diverse population also presents an

opportunity to begin with young children the process of learning to value and accept others for their differences as well as their similarities(Derman-Sparks, 1989; Edwards, et al., 1993).

4. Social consciousness in Italy has evolved to a point where community-supported early childhood education is a reality. Although most people involved with young children in America would acknowledge that we are a long ways from the level of support afforded children in Reggio, child advocacy is a priority of early childhood educators, and the level of national, regional, and local organization on behalf of children is well established and increasing.

5. The issue of assessment and documentation is under intense scrutiny in the United States at present. Early childhood practitioners are at the forefront of the debate over what constitutes appropriate "authentic assessment." Many of the ideas articulated in recent years by NAEYC, in particular, would support the emphasis and methods of documentation used in Reggio preschools(Bredekamp, 1987).

Secondly, although there is much to be encouraged about with respect to areas of commonality, preschools in Reggio have shown over successful work for three decades that some of the most commonly held beliefs in this country about specific aspects of developmental theory and practice can and should be reexamined. In short, Reggio presents a challenge to our current views of early childhood education:

1. Class sizes and ratios in Reggio schools are higher than those believed to be appropriate in the U.S., but teachers and other adults work successfully within a framework of small groups and freely chosen space, and when

given the choice for more teachers or more space, see space as a more important entity(Edwards et al., 1993,)

2. The idea of children remaining with the same teacher and group for three years runs counter to an American reluctance to allow teachers or caregivers to get "too close" to children. However, the extended family relationship which results seems to support and nurture children in Reggio(Edwards et al., 1993)
3. The concept of "child-centered" in America focuses on the individual child; in Reggio, child-centered curriculum is applied successfully most often within a group context(Edwards et al., 1993).
4. Time is valued differently in Reggio-to be used in leisurely fashion and at a pace dictated by the rhythms of the child; in America, a preoccupation with "structure" has resulted in a rigidity of thought about schedules and fragmented blocks of time designated for specific purposes as directed by the teacher(Edwards et al., 1993).
5. Themes are revisited again and again; reflection is central to beliefs about how children build integrated learning, while in American practice, discrete "units" of study have traditionally been presented from start to finish, and then "put away."(Edwards et al., 1993).
6. Teachers' relationships with children in Reggio are expected to be open-ended; they desire "complicated" relationships with parents, and view themselves as lifelong learners along with the children. In America, the contrasting view is that children are labeled and categorized, teachers keep parents informed, but keep their distance, and in many cases, "finish" their

education before they begin to work with children(Edwards et al., 1993).

7. The value placed on products of children's work in Reggio schools seems to contrast with the current American emphasis of process over product until it is examined as being part of a process of building relationships and reciprocity through symbolic representation(Edwards et al., 1993).

8. In Reggio, children are expected and encouraged to share judgemental evaluation and negotiate conflicts within peer groups. Multiple points of view and sometimes emotional displays are tolerated and in fact, solicited. The feeling is that growth will not occur without collaboration, and that cooperation will develop when children themselves have the opportunity to work out discrepancies in an environment where they feel safe, secure, and confident enough to do so. American educators are used to "keeping the peace" in classrooms at the expense of dialogue and dynamic interaction, and feel uncomfortable with this notion(Edwards et al., 1993, New, 1993).

9. Many American educators equate creativity with "art" and feel incompetent or uncomfortable dealing with the issue of creativity as an integral part of the classroom. In Reggio, creativity is exemplified in a global sense to accommodate children's multiple intelligences and modes of thoughtful expression. Building and encouraging creativity is considered indispensible to fully integrated learning(Gandini, 1992).

Third, the Reggio Emilia experience leaves American educators with the feeling that we must use reflective thought, as they do, to develop challenges which will lead us on a productive path demonstrating our committment to improving our own work with young children. Many important issues have been raised by those who have visited and

studied in Reggio.

Rebecca New(1990a;1990b; 1993) sees the important issues as these: 1)community support/parent involvement, 2)administrative policies and organizational features 3)teachers as learners 4)role of the environment as a vehicle for social exchange 5)project approach as a vehicle for meaningful learning which validates children's interests 6)the significance of aesthetics and the expressive arts-the100 languages of children.

LeeKeenan and Edwards (1992) examined using the project approach with toddlers and describe both concerns and benefits to its use at that level. They recommend looking at the possiblilities further within a framework of staff observation,an emergent approach, and comprehensive documentation.

Margie Carter(1992) suggests strategies to use with teachers to help them apply a more creative approach in their classrooms. She feels it is important to help teachers idenfify their own views, examine their environments, deepen their understanding of child development, and refine their skills and techniques to promote interaction.

Trepanier-Street (1993) believes that Reggio can provide insights and a framework for Americans to look at the issues of: 1)child-centered classrooms, 2)children's participation in planning and evaluation, 3) the teacher's role and levels of accountablility, 4) continuity as expressed through time, themes, curriculum, and home/school/community relations, 5)integrated curriculum, 6)building cognitive structures through transformations, and 7) meaning-making through cooperative project work.

Conclusion

Lilian Katz (Edwards et al., 1993) and Sue Bredekamp(1993) have discussed how Reggio challenges our view of the child as a person with needs to be met by adults. In America, the image of the competent child has not always been dealt with successfully or positively for the benefit of the child, and we have adopted a protectiveness for children which we are now forced by powerful images of Italian children's work to rethink.

Reggio Emilia has built a program with conceptual integrity, a humane environment where all of the human beings who interact there have respect for one another and confidence in their social and intellectual potential. There is consistency in the application of the theory and philosophy behind the program which permeates the entire system, from the community-based administration to the daily menus prepared by the cooks. Americans are astounded and sometimes intimidated by the overpowering images they take with them after having visited the schools there. Many look at the myriad of problems and attempted solutions we have generated in our own country and wonder if we will ever be able to achieve the kind of success that seems so obvious in a city of 130,000 people in northern Italy. Paul Kaufman, while filming a documentary on Reggio for PBS had occasion to stop and reflect on a discussion he had had with Loris Malaguzzi about the importance of relationships. As he watched a group of Italian men animatedly talking in the city piazza, his reflections may have meaning for American educators trying to make sense of their own impressions of Reggio Emilia (Edwards, et al., 1993, p. 301):

> A field of poppies, a piazza of people - it is all the same. The children dance their dance of world making and the old men also dance. The bells of a nearby church sound and the producer recalls the faces of the children - "Little Saviours of Interpretations," he muses. God knows we need them.

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Appendix

Projects

While reviewing the literature for this paper, many projects were either referred to or described in detail by various authors and researchers. Some of these were projects conducted in the Reggio schools, and some were projects attempted either in collaboration with Reggio staff or by American teachers alone in U.S. schools. This appendix includes a summary of those projects for reference. Some of these projects were documented in the exhibit, "100 Languages of Children."

Reggio Emilia Projects:

The Long Jump Project

This project was conducted for about eight weeks at the Diana School and was led by Laura Rubizzi, co-teacher Paola Cagliari, and atelierista Vea Vecchi. It was initiated when a school-wide jumping competition was suggested and four children volunteered to be the coordinators of the project. They began by looking at and acting out photographs that were presented to them of olympic athletes performing the long jump. Through their drawings, they broke down the elements of motion and began the process of diagramming and hypothesizing the layout of the run-up area, jumping surface, and landing area. The track was laid out in the courtyard and after much experimentation, decided upon. The next phase of the project dealt with making and deciding how to communicate the rules of the competition for all of the children who would be likely to participate. The use of symbolic representation to represent the measurement procedure, convey the rules, and communicate information about the project took many forms(Edwards, et al., 1993).

The Dinosaur Project

This project took place in the Anna Frank School over four months time and was conducted by Roberta Badodi and Baji Rankin, an American doctoral student. Six three-to-six year olds were involved in the project, three boys and three girls. The children's interest in dinosaurs was explored by the teacher and after several days of gentle probing, it was determined that there was a high level of interest in the size of dinosaurs. The children decided to construct a drawing of a life-size dinosaur. After building models of tyrannosaurus rex, they figured out a way to use a variety of arbitrary measuring devices on a nearby athletic field to replicate the dimensions of a 27x9mtr diplodacus. When the athletic field was not available for them to finish the project there, the courtyard of the school, which only measured 13x6mtr was pressed into use. The children were then challenged to make the dinosaur fit the space they had available, which was accomplished after much trial and error with working-to-scale(Edwards, et al., 1993; Rankin, 1992).

The Intelligence of a Puddle

At the Diana School, children explored puddles and the reflective and dimensional properties of water. They used mirrors and colors in their explorations, and later drew trees and people and placed them around mirrors to suggest their experiences with puddles. They dramatized their experiences using shadows and mirrors and their discussions produced many provacative thoughts about imagery and children's attempts to make sense of physical phenomena. Examples of some of their comments:

"The water is lazy, but when we walk in it it makes little waves."

"I can touch the top of the tree because this is another world, a world of water."

"Help, I am falling into the hole of the world!"

(Edwards, et al.,1993, p. 128-130)

The City in the Rain

Children of the Viletta School were curious about how the city changes when it rains. They conducted a project for several months to explore the transformations wrought by rain to the buildings and the people. They prepared weeks in advance, because the city was having a dry spell, and were very excited when the rain finally came. They explored the sounds of rain as it touches various surfaces and investigated how the city handles and uses rain, where it comes from and expressed their ideas about invented water works systems(Edwards, et al., 1993).

L'Ombre(shadows)

The teacher generated interest in the topic by photographing the children outside as they explored their shadows. They drew their ideas about shadows and discussion generated questions and exploration about light, direction, and all of the variables that affect the appearance of shadows. Children spent time experimenting, and were challenged to redraw their conclusions and transformed knowledge when the teacher placed yellow sun stickers on papers to represent the direction from which the sun shone. Some children had so much confidence in their ability to predict the shadows that would appear that they added flashlights and other light sources to the challenge(New, 1990b).

Outer Space

Teachers were concerned with children's increasing interest in war toys. They took the children to a toy store which they explored. The video games seemed to generate the most interest, and one was brought back to the school. The children enjoyed playing outer space games and from there, all kinds of materials were used to construct space vehicles . The challenges and problems associated with space, including communication, were investigated. As a result of the project, teachers and parents learned a great deal about children's fascination with war toys through their observations and interactions with the children and developed strategies for encouraging more prosocial behaviors (New, 1990b).

Self-Portraits

An ongoing theme in all of the Reggio schools is exploration of self-image. Mirrors and other reflective surfaces are used in inventive ways to encourage the children to reflect on themselves. Children often draw or create with other media self-portraits and dictate to the teachers descriptions of themselves. The portraits are revisited later and compared and contrasted with present appearance. Children carefully experiment with ways of representing features and share their ideas with others often(New, 1990b).

To Make a Portrait of a Lion

Children on an excursion to the city piazza explored the statue of the lion at the center of the city when they decided to make a portrait of a lion. Each school has a

"mascot" (for example, a zebra)and it was very important to them that their portraits be believable. They returned many times to the piazza as well as exploring as many visual sources of lions as possible. They engaged in pantomime and many other dramatic and expressive activities experiencing and expressing their impressions of "lion" before constructed clay sculptures which became their final "portraits." (City of Reggio, 1987).

The Crowd

This project was conducted at the Diana School by Vea Vecchi. The teacher asked the children to use a box over summer vacation to collect treasures and mementos from their trips and family excursions to share when they would return in the fall. When the children did return, although the teacher expected they would be excited to share their artifacts, it became clear through discussion that one of the things most impressive to the children was their feelings as small people when part of a crowd. Their discussions and descriptions of what a crowd was developed into a project with many drawings and constructions to try and recreate the feelings and impressions the children had. Puppet play, dramatization, shadow play, and clay work were explored. The children went to town and photographed people in crowds. Their explorations and experiments with perspective and point of view were greatly expanded as a result of the project(Edwards, et al., 1993).

Projects Conducted in American Classrooms

The City in the Snow

The project was conducted by four teachers at the Marks Meadows Elementary

School in Amherst, Massachusetts. It was modeled after the Reggio project, "The City in the Rain." Children discussed their impressions of snow and did initial drawings of snow scenes. The teachers simulated snowfall on a model and the children in the various classrooms decided on several ways they would investigate the properties and qualities of snow, and the challenges it presents when it falls. They drew murals of the city on which they painted where they thought the snow would stick when it fell. After the snow finally fell, they had several outdoor experiences which they interpreted in a variety of ways to attempt to capture the sounds, textures, and feel of snow. They studied and examined snowflakes, ice crystals, and drew clouds and snow-making machines. The teachers felt that symbolic representation was experienced in a variety of ways at many levels through the course of the project, which lasted for many weeks(Edwards, et al., 1993).

The Water Project, the House Project, and "Looking at Each Other"

Teachers at the University of Massachusetts Lab school were interested in attempting to use the project approach with toddlers. The water project was their first attempt. Interest levels were high, and the teachers provided the children with many opportunities to explore the qualities and properties of water. For three months, the teachers observed and followed the children's leads to add materials and props to their water play. They learned much about how the children conceptualize events such as "the water melts sand" and "the sponge ate the water."

The house project was conducted because teachers thought children would be interested in the topic of houses. They discovered that their own interest exceeded that of the children, and while they had observed a very high level of interest in construction, it

did not translate into a topic with enough emotional response to be sustaining when related to the idea of "houses."

The third project with toddlers was called, "Looking at Each Other" and grew out of the teacher's observations that the children were becoming more interested in their peers. The teachers introduced the idea with masks which had been made from photographs of the children's faces. This was a highly stimulating event and many different things were done with the children's images on succeeding days, such as freezing them in ice cubes, buring them in the sand table, and hiding them in playdough, to generate thought and interest with the children. Parents were involved, and at the end of the project, all of the adults felt that the children had become much more aware of themselves and others(Edwards, et al., 1993; LeeKeenan and Edwards, 1992).